

Moving Mountains: Protestant Christianity and the Spiritual Landscape of Northern Luzon

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The spiritual life of upland Philippine groups has long involved the geography of the mountainous areas in which they live, which remains true today among some conservative Protestants. This article presents an example of a non-denominational Christian congregation in the northern Philippine city of Baguio. This form of Christianity, firmly woven into narratives of modernity, prohibits the sacralisation of physical place in a manner reflective of the traditional understandings of material agency. Instead, these contemporary Christians engage in the process Webb Keane (following Latour) has called 'purification', in which materiality and agency are discursively and conceptually drawn apart. I argue that the form of Christianity practised here allows for a re-inscription of the mountains with a Christian significance that, while no longer making them a landscape of agency and power, is an attempt to go beyond the 'merely' cultural significance given to the mountain identity seen in public celebrations held throughout the upland region by Christian and non-Christian Cordillerians.

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The northern half of the Philippine island of Luzon is distinguished by an impressive range of mountains known as the Gran Cordillera Central. Early Spanish accounts characterised the area above 2100 metres by the difficulty of the terrain and the distinct populations inhabiting it. Upland groups actively resisted pacification by the Spanish, who characterised them as 'wild' and 'pagan' as opposed to those of the 'Christianised' lowlands (Scott 1974; Finin 2005).

The ethnic groups of the Cordillera remain distinctive, but in ways reflective of the dramatic changes of the twentieth century. Centuries of conflict between the

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mountain populations and both Spanish colonists and colonised lowland groups prepared the way for the work of United States colonial pacification and state-building in the first half of the 1900s. The people of the Gran Cordillera opened their territory to US influence and allowed for a new relationship with outsiders. Notable among the continuing influences of the United States in this largely Catholic nation is the relative prominence of Protestant Christian congregations founded by US missionary efforts (Clymer 1986). Today, upland groups of northern Luzon often identify more with forms of Protestant Christianity than with the Roman Catholicism of the Hispanicised lowlands (Juergensmeyer 2006, 383).

I arrived in the Philippines in 1998 to begin research on churches founded in the post-World War II era by missionaries affiliated with the United States Southern Baptist Convention. In the northern Philippine city of Baguio, I spent my time principally among such 'Southern Baptist' congregations, seeking to understand how their membership—in a global religion—developed in locally inflected terms (Howell 2008). However, one of these congregations was largely comprised of people from the upland minority groups constituting the majority population in this mountain city known as the 'Gateway to the Cordillera'; and through my contact with them, I came to know a confederation of non-Baptist churches known as BIBAK, the subject of this article.

The BIBAK congregations (taking their name from five of the larger mountain groups: Bontoc, Ifugao, Benguet, Apayao and Kalinga) were founded by missionaries from the interdenominational SEND International organisation, who held to a mission model of 'homogeneous units' as the means of evangelism.² This meant that, from the beginning, they encouraged the congregations to focus on ethnically distinct populations, in this case various minority groups of the upland Philippines.³ By 1998, the three congregations known as BIBAK churches were under the leadership of Filipino pastors, but retained the name and vision of their 'target populations' and remained known as 'mountain churches'.⁴

The first of the BIBAK leaders I came to know was a friend of several key members of the Southern Baptist churches where I did my principal research. A college-educated man and travel agent, he found my work interesting and was anxious for me to see his own congregation as a contrast to what he believed were the culturally inauthentic practices of many upland Protestants. He described the BIBAK church to me as 'truly a mountain church'. 'We believe we do not have to be like the lowlanders to be Christians', he asserted. Knowing my interest in the intersection of culture and Christianity, he invited me to visit his church, which I did on several occasions.

Here, I take the case of this mountain church as an opportunity to understand how BIBAK Christians have re-imagined their relationship to the landscape from which they draw their identity. From the earliest ethnographic accounts of Philippine people, the spiritual life of upland groups has been linked to the geography of the mountainous areas in which they live (Jenks 1905; Forbes 1928). In ways familiar to upland groups throughout Southeast Asia (Keyes 1995), the upland groups of the Philippines have organised economic, social, political and religious life around the

seasons, topography and ecology of the mountains. From the world-famous rice terraces of the Ifugao region to the ritual complexes structured around the highest peaks, the common features of mountain life have prevailed. That the BIBAK churches identify as 'mountain churches' testifies to the continued importance of mountain geography to their identity.

At the same time, the Christianity embraced by these churches radically contradicts traditional spiritual understandings of land and place. Firmly woven into narratives of modernity, the BIBAK form of conservative Protestant Christianity prohibits the sacralisation of physical place in a manner reflective of the traditional semiotics of upland religion, of traditional Catholicism or of the possibilities found in new religious movements in the Philippines.⁵ Instead, contemporary BIBAK Christians engage in the process Webb Keane (2007, 54–55), following Latour (1993), has called 'purification', a project of modernity that seeks to 'sort out the proper locus of agency in the world', creating a 'vision of the self...abstracted from material and social entanglements'. Their Christianity emphasises discontinuity with the religious systems that preceded them and separation from the material world around them (Cannell 2006; Robbins 2007). BIBAK Christians are not left, however, without understanding of the landscape as relevant to their religious lives. Just as conversion to Christianity has been re-theorised away from sudden change or hegemonic imposition towards a more active reconstruction of life in new terms (see Rambo 2003), so, for the BIBAK Christians of Baguio City, this process of purification is one of re-imagining the mountain landscape in Christian terms.

By exploring the way these modern Christians assert a 'mountain' identity in the context of their Christian faith, I argue that, within the purification process of modernity, they have re-inscribed the mountains with a spiritual—now Christian—significance that locates their spiritual identity with the mountains while allowing for the ongoing narrative of Christian universalism and 'globality'. This new significance implies neither an agentive landscape in the terms described by Allerton and Bovensiepen (both in this issue) nor the animation of 'nature' (Telle, this issue; cf. Ingold 1993). Nor does it suggest that BIBAK mountain identity is 'merely' cultural (cf. Constable 1994). These Protestant Christians emphasise the sovereignty of God over all life and history, while simultaneously foregrounding their God-given identity as 'mountain Christians'. In the urban context, living apart from agricultural or communal ties to the physical mountains, they use the language and ideologies of their faith to recast the *idea* of the mountains, if not the mountains themselves (cf. Amster, this issue). Ultimately, they exemplify how Christianity becomes woven into the narratives of location and self in postcolonial places where it has taken root, exemplifying the limits and possibilities found within this local–global religion.⁶

Mountains of Power

Mountains play a key role in the mythology of many upland groups. Among the Bontoc, for example, the procreative, creational and provisional acts of the apical

ancestor, Lumawig, are linked to specific mountains and places (Jenks 1905, 202). Albert Jenks (p. 208) reported that, at key moments in various ceremonies, groups of men, women and children 'passed slowly up the steep mountainside immediately west of Bontoc. These people went singly and in groups of two to four, following trails to points on the mountain's crest... [where]... each person in turn voiced an invitation to her departed ancestors to come to the Mangmang feast'. Among the Ibaloy, Mt Pulag, the highest peak in the Philippines, is thought to be the residence of 'spirit-relatives', key players in various social and religious ceremonies of traditional Ibaloy life (Leano 1987, 201, 213). Particular mountains have, likewise, held places in mythology as sites of refuge during massive floods or as the first homeland of ancestors who had found refuge there during disaster (Scott 1974, 180; Keesing and Keesing 1934, 41). Early accounts of upland religious practice include many references to landscape and territory as both locus and focus of particular ritual activity (Scott 1974, 192).

As among other upland groups throughout Southeast Asia, the relationship between geography and identity took on further importance as colonial powers moved into the lowlands, imposing law, custom and religion on these more accessible populations. Employing the mountain terrain as a natural form of resistance, the people of the uplands used the geographic separation to enhance the political and cultural separation between themselves as 'free' people and the pacified and dominated lowland groups (Scott 1974, Chapter 2).

Economic activity has developed for centuries in accord with the terrain and climate of the mountains as opposed to those of the lowlands (Keesing and Keesing 1934, 190ff). The religious practices accompanying the economic lives of many mountain peoples were notably more elaborate than those of the lowland farmers, who, by the late Spanish era, were engaged in a rationalised production process that pushed traditional religious practices out of the field and into the church exclusively (Keesing and Keesing 1934). Thomas Gibson (1986, 198–200; see also Cannell 1999, 3–4) noted that among the Mangyan and Buid mountain people of Mindoro the geographic distinctions of upland/lowland and forest/settlement also served as spiritual and social distinctions. For this reason, mountains and places associated with them (caves, waterfalls, boulders) have become intimately connected to historic and continuing Philippine religious traditions.

The literal power of the sacred place—land or mountain, from which the *anting-anting* bearer/wearer draws spiritual and magical/mystical strength—is also similarly nurtured by the believers of the *Bayani* in various sacred mountains and places—caves, rocks, waterfalls, streams and other natural formations that have been the traditional haunts of the denizens of the Filipino underworld. (Mendoza *et al.* 1995, 191)

One possible response to the disenchantment of mountains and sacred landscape brought about by the imposition of Catholic doctrine and secular ideologies of the state has always been the wholesale rejection of modernist schemes of nationalism

and subjecthood. Scholars such as Reynaldo Ileto (1979, 1998) and Renato Constantino (1978) have demonstrated the power of nationalist movements to re-inscribe places and objects with spiritual power. In particular, mountains have often featured prominently in the landscape of political resistance and nationalism (Ileto 1998, 76–77; see also Sturtevant 1976, 94–95; Alejo 2000).

The most well-known examples of this are the revivalist cults of Rizalistas and other spiritualists around Mt Banahaw and Mt San Cristobal in Southern Luzon. Here, contemporary religious nationalists make pilgrimages to caves, waterfalls, grottos and other sites on the mountains in search of spiritual power (Lahiri 2005). Even those integrated into the Catholic Church turn to the mountain as a source of power:

True, the Spanish priest in his church was in a privileged position and was a source of power because of this direct connection with god. The holy mountain in the distance, however, was and still is, [*sic*] recognised as a source of supernatural powers as well. At certain times of the year, such as holy week, such potency was accessible to those who made the pilgrimage to the mountain. (Ileto 1998, 85)

Therefore, while mountains, and the landscape generally, have for centuries figured prominently in the spiritual lives of Filipinos, they often emerge in opposition to modernist narratives of the nation and global capital. With the growth of Protestant missionary movements strongly linked with global narratives of modernity, it might seem that such spiritualised landscapes would be de-emphasised, if not excised, from Filipino religious discourse (*cf.* Maggay 1999; also Cannell 2005). As Robbins (2006, 76) has argued, conversion to Christianity may make possible a ‘symbolic detachment’.

However, globalised Christianity, Protestant or otherwise, does not inherently lead its adherents to marginalise the landscape in their religious imagination, stripping it of spiritual significance. As Amster (this issue p. 313) asserts, ‘conversion can have the opposite effect to that Robbins describes, and eventually lead to a resacralisation of local place’. In other words, within some narratives of Protestant Christianity, even while the landscape becomes purified of spiritual agency, Christians are able to refashion the relationship of spirituality and landscape.

Evangelising the Land

Whilst many forms of Protestant Christianity made barely a ripple in the anthropological pond for much of the discipline’s history, anthropologists in the late 1990s and early part of this century have turned their attention to non-Western Christianity in a much more robust way. Taking Christianity as a social fact, and exploring the adoption and development of the religion as a cultural phenomenon, scholars such as Diane Austin-Broos (1997, 2001), Birgit Meyer (1999) and Joel Robbins (2004) have written monographs exploring the development of Christian communities, taking the religion as a cultural object *sui generis*. In the predominantly

Catholic nation of the Philippines, Protestant churches, many of which arrived with the American colonialists in 1898, have been significant for the identity of thousands of northern mountain peoples for decades. As Robbins (2004, 34) noted for the Papua New Guineans he studied, 'Christianity has tremendous weight in Urapmin culture... it has become cultural with a vengeance'.

Simply noting the local importance of the religion does not, of course, explain the particular forms, meanings or motivations involved for the BIBAK Christians in adopting and practising their faith. This requires greater interpretation. Keane's (2007) work on Calvinists on the island of Sumba in Eastern Indonesia provides a valuable analysis of the nature of the cultural (that is, semiotic) shift that occurred following contact between Calvinist missionaries and the traditional religious systems of the Sumbanese. Seeking to explain the nature and consequences of the shift, Keane (2007, 23–25) utilises the notion of 'purification'.⁷ He notes that, in the European development of Calvinist thought, a principal preoccupation of the reformers was separation of the material and the spiritual, such that agency would be properly ascribed only to the spiritual (human and Divine). This has become a defining project of modernity, in which the material world is radically disenchanted. Unlike those who argue that distinctions between natural and 'supernatural' phenomena are universally applicable categories in anthropological analysis (Lohmann 2003), Keane contends that the Calvinist/Reformed theology supporting some Christian views of agency is fundamentally distinct from those Christian and non-Christian views in which physicality and divinity are linked in a coherent theological world view. The project of working out a religious life is ongoing and paradoxical, Keane notes, owing to the material necessity of communication through language and embodiment, but the goal and possibilities for 'purifying' agency of material 'entanglements' involve what Keane (2007, 16–21) describes as a shift in the 'semiotic ideology' from traditional religion (fetish, ritual) to modernity (verbal sincerity, disembodied religious belief; see also Keane 1997a).

For the Sumbanese Calvinist, conversion brings a semiotic ideology accommodating a new relationship between the self and the environment. The self—an agent free from material constraint—is able to create a distance from his or her own commitments. Moreover, the self now stands distinct from the material world it inhabits, free to evaluate, manipulate or utilise that environment in new ways.

Contemporary Sumbanese Calvinists and the non-denominational Protestant upland Filipinos of the BIBAK congregation are alike in taking this semiotic shift for granted. I heard many Baguio City Protestants of various denominations accuse both Catholics and traditional religionists (*spiritistas*) of 'idol worship' or 'praying to pieces of wood and stone'. For the Protestants, the confusion of agency is a key dividing line between their Christianity and the religion of others.⁸

More than simply providing a religious boundary, however, this commitment to the semiotic ideology of modernist agency provided the Protestants with a new way of relating to their environment. For many of the Baptists (see Howell 2008), the principal effect of this was to provide a new relationship to their 'culture', redefining

it in terms that allowed them to resituate themselves against their own cultural identity. However, unlike the Baptists, whose concerns about culture and the practice of their religion normally took into account their larger (global) denominational identity, the discourse of the BIBAK churches was much more focused on their relationship to their own (locally situated) past. In the latter, I encountered the process of disenchantment expressed in terms of the landscape itself. Here, the identity of ‘mountain people’ was maintained as central to the existence of the church. As I describe below, ‘mountain culture’ was displayed in a variety of ways throughout the services and in the discourse of congregational members. At the same time, there was no doubt that the work of purification constituted a central theological commitment.

Keane (2007, Chapter 7; also 1997b) notes the importance of verbal sincerity as indicative of the modernist commitment to a semiotic ideology of separation and purification. For the members of BIBAK, verbal assent and doctrinal purity were also central to the Christian identity of the congregation and its members. In the first service I attended, the preacher was a North American missionary associated with SEND International, the organisation involved in the original founding of the congregation. He spoke as a guest, delivering a sermon based on the Gospel passage of John 11, where Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. At one point, he said: ‘The power of God brings life where there was only death. It isn’t our own work. It isn’t the work of our family, or healers, or politicians, or even our own goodness. It’s only God who can bring us to life.’

In emphasising the power of God over other aspects of life—family, healers, politicians—the preacher draws a clear distinction between the power of God, that is, His agency, and the ‘material’ world of family, traditional religion and politics. Later in the sermon, he revisited the point even more clearly.

There’s no speaker, no pastor, no leader, who can speak words of power. We can’t go to Quiapo [a famous Cathedral in Manila known as a site of spiritual power] or climb the steps of the Lourdes Grotto [a shrine in Baguio City thought to bring fortune to those who climb the 120 steps to its peak] to get this power. Only God can supply this power.

Here, the work of purification is brought to the forefront, as statues, shrines and holy places are singled out for criticism. For the Protestant Christian, of BIBAK or elsewhere, the power of God and the agency to believe in it can never be confused with the material world, which may merely point to such power.

The work of purification is also carried out in the giving of testimonies of conversion by the members of congregations such as those of the BIBAK church. Although I never attended an ‘evangelistic’ meeting at these congregations (as I did at several Baptist and other Protestant congregations in the city), I had the opportunity to hear conversion narratives from several members and former members of the congregations. In each case, the dominant theme was the decision of the individual to accept the religion as a result of the work of God directly or as an act of free will, or a

combination of the two. This act of believing and converting, ascribing agentive power only to human and divine agents acting freely from material constraint, allows the Christian to stand removed from the material world as an independent will dealing with the pure thought/doctrine of the faith.

One of the leaders of a Baptist congregation included in my research had first become a Protestant Christian through a BIBAK congregation in the neighbouring city of La Trinidad. She was a college student at the time, having moved from her home in Mountain Province to attend Benguet State University:

I started attending because of [my] friends. They are like me, mountain people. They are from that place, so I am comfortable with them. I know they are Christian [and] I think it is all right. I will go [to the Bible study.] When I am there, I say, maybe God has brought these people. Maybe He has called me. They tell me I have to decide. I cannot just keep coming for my friends. It must be me. I know [God] wants me, so I am deciding: 'I am a Christian.'

In this woman's narrative, God initiates the call, but it is her own will that must finally come into play. She notes that it cannot come through her friends or her participation in the Bible study. It is true that, throughout this interview, she never denied the possibility of other, non-agentive, influences. Luck, chance or fate could potentially be drawn into the narrative as influences bringing her to the point where she could eventually decide to become a Christian. At the same time, her conversation narrative, like dozens of others I collected from Protestants in Baguio, came to a climax with the decision she made herself.⁹ She reaches a kind of crisis point where she must decide for herself to accept the beliefs of Christianity, placing agency in her own hands.

As a college student and an Ibaloi woman raised among other types of Protestants in her home province, she was undoubtedly already familiar with the modernist narrative of personal agency she would employ in retelling her conversion. However, such language is not required, or even in the majority, among members of the modern Philippine state. Most of her classmates and family members maintain membership in the Catholic or Anglican Church, where the work of purification is carried out in rather different ways, if at all. Certainly, versions of traditional religion, which remain prominent in the Baguio region, were available discourses, so the decision of this woman and other members of Protestant congregations to take on the language of agency so deeply implicated in the modernist project was not a necessary feature of living in the Philippine state. It is, rather, a theological commitment to a view of the self and the world where agency is held firmly in the hands of moral agents (humans or God), and the material world exists as the disenchanted objects of modern life.

Reclaiming the Mountains

In light of this purifying language of modernity and agency, the relationship of the BIBAK Christians to the physical landscape underwent similar reorganisation.

No longer could the mountains be perceived as sources or sites of spiritual power. Like the rest of the physical world, the mountains were material creations without agency. To confuse the relationship of agency and physical location risked the work of purification undertaken in the Christian project generally.

However, the identity of BIBAK Christians as ‘mountain people’ necessarily invoked the landscape. The identity of the congregation as a ‘mountain church’ further centralised the physical environment as having spiritual significance. ‘As mountain people’, one congregation member told me, ‘this place [the mountain provinces] is special to us. We live here, but it is more than [a] place to live. This is our home. Our grandparents and great-grandparents, going back. This is our place.’ This particular man—an older man, perhaps in his 60s—provided this view in response to a question I was asking another member of the congregation. After the service, I had been standing just outside the door, talking with one of my contacts about what he would think of moving into the lowlands to establish BIBAK churches for the upland ethnic minority people who were living there. The older man, overhearing my question, offered the view above. He was moving on and our exchange was brief, but I interpreted his comment as more than a statement of fact. His was a normative position; mountain people *should* stay in mountain places. In an invocation almost like the traditional relationship with ancestors, and a kind of plea for the maintenance of a mountain-based Christianity, he defined the relationship of identity and place in moral terms.¹⁰

For BIBAK Christians, to remain committed to a ‘mountain’ identity, particularly in conjunction with their Christian identity, potentially puts at risk the work of purification accomplished through the theological and cultural work of the congregation. Some former members of the BIBAK churches did express reservations about making their mountain identity central to their religious lives, suggesting that the use of a landscape or place-based identity might threaten the more important, universal, characteristics of their religious identity. For them, the ‘purity’ of religion was in its placelessness and the non-local quality that made it relevant to all people in all times. One of the former BIBAK members now in a Southern Baptist church vigorously opposed the designation of churches as ‘mountain churches’. She was not shy in telling me, along with the BIBAK leader with whom I was standing at the time, that she felt the BIBAK vision was ‘exclusive’ and went against the universality of the faith. For this woman, and a number of others with whom I spoke, the use of the place-based identity suggested that the BIBAK churches were localising an ‘unlocalisable’ religion, giving the physicality of place—in this case, the mountains—a significance at odds with the transcendence of their faith.¹¹

Naturally, the BIBAK leaders pushed back against the notion that their use of a local identity somehow contradicted their commitment to the transcendent truth claims of Christianity. The several leaders with whom I spoke emphasised their inclusivity and orthodoxy in spite of their ethnically and spatially specific identity as a ‘mountain church’. ‘We are not exclusive’, one said in an interview. ‘All are welcome. We are focused on mountain people, but we are not exclusive. The gospel is for all.

We are not saying, “you are not welcome”. We are just making special outreaches to mountain people.’

In making these ‘special outreaches’, the members of the BIBAK congregations index their ethnic identity throughout their religious services in a variety of ways. The first time I attended a BIBAK service, I arrived rather late. The church met in a small house, nestled into a working-class neighbourhood of Baguio City. On a bright sunny Sunday morning, I wandered the tangle of streets, checking each gate for the numbers that would lead me to the service. I found the door about thirty minutes after the service started. Pushing aside the large, hand-carved Narra-wood door of the house, I found myself entering the back of a long living-room, where plastic patio chairs had been set up in about ten rows, four chairs on each side of a centre aisle. The congregation of approximately fifty people was just preparing to take the offering as I slipped into a seat in the back.

Two young men dressed in vests made of a traditional mountain cloth (one in the green and black of the Bontoc, the other in the red typical of the Ifugao) brought around woven grass plates lined with more of the distinctive fabric of mountain communities. In the front, another young man played a small electronic keyboard, leading into a familiar Western hymn sung by all as the offering was brought up to the front. As we finished singing the hymn (All Creatures of Our God and King), the White North American missionary came to the front to begin his sermon from the Gospel of John. Following the sermon, the leader through whom I had made my first contact with this congregation came up to give announcements. He went through several upcoming events, including an outreach event to be held in a remote mountain community far to the north of Baguio. As with every other aspect of the service (including the songs), he spoke purely in English, not mixing in any Tagalog to create the ‘Taglish’ widely spoken throughout Philippine society, including the Baptist churches of my research. Nor did his, or anyone’s, speech include Ilokano (the northern lowland language) or any of the upland languages undoubtedly represented in the congregation.

In one meeting of another BIBAK congregation, where I made a comment about the widespread use of English, a member of the group explained to me: ‘We are very comfortable in English. We are all Cordillerians.’ Since the early days of US colonialism, members of the mountain communities have asserted their fluency in English as evidence of their unique colonial experience, distinct from that of the lowland people (Ilokano and Tagalog) who did not have the same educational experience with American-run schools. Moreover, the only common Philippine language of the mountain regions, Ilokano, had strong associations with the internal colonialism and exploitation upland people had for centuries experienced at the hands of lowland Ilokans. Tagalog carried such connotations even more powerfully. The use of English, as the *lingua franca* in the BIBAK churches, was consistent with what I knew of their ethnic boundary maintenance.

In the religious practice of the service itself, the visual markers of upland weaving, the vests worn by the ushers, and even the invitation to the North American

missionary to preach there that Sunday reinforced the mountain identity foregrounded in the discourse of the church members.

The second time I attended a BIBAK service, I returned to the same house, arriving on time. The format of the service itself was little changed from the one I had observed previously. We began with a welcome from a young Ibaloi man (he identified himself as such) who had come to Baguio for university study. The welcome was followed by a familiar Western hymn (*Great is thy Faithfulness*) and two praise choruses, all accompanied by electronic keyboard. This time, another musician played along on a traditional upland drum, a long, thin lap drum made of bamboo and goatskin. The sermon was delivered by my original contact, who referred to several New Testament passages on the theme of commitment and service. The focus was largely on individual moral improvement and each person's 'Christian walk', yet several times he emphasised the identity of the congregation as related to the mountains and upland ethnicity:

God gave us a special heritage, a special place. These beautiful mountains, the water, the air, these are all gifts from God. We are from this [place.] God gives all this to us. It is a gift and we are to use it for His glory. We are called to outreach to all people and especially our people. Our people know God, but they are [*sic*] wandered away. They are distracted—by the city, by jobs, by travelling to Saudi Arabia or wherever—they leave this place and they forget. We can help them remember who they are, that God is over all.

Later, toward the end of the sermon, he reiterated his call to remind others from the mountain regions of their identity as both upland people and Christians. 'God is reminding his people that mountain people are also His people. He gave us these mountains, this land, these beautiful cloths [he points to the cloth in the offering basket], all these.'

What comes out of his sermon, the religious practice, and later interviews is not the re-inscription of agency on the landscape or mountains as material fact, but, rather, as a re-signification. Like the Kelabit described by Amster (this issue), the BIBAK Christians in Baguio City are largely mobile, urban people, many quite successful in local terms, who have come to the city for work or educational opportunities. In the Kelabit case, the process by which the congregation resacralises local natural space in a Christian idiom is through newly developed ritual practices (Amster this issue, p. 317). In the BIBAK example, this takes place in the linguistic categories and narrative formulations individuals bring to their religious subjectivities (*cf.* Engelke 2007). For the BIBAK Christians, the landscape of the mountains and ancestral homeland becomes a spiritual index for the work of God in their midst.

The BIBAK Christians' work of purification is unthreatened, and even enhanced, as they re-imagine their landscape as a 'gift'. By calling the mountains and 'their place' generally a 'gift from God', they are not imbuing them with spiritual power in a fetish-like sense, but *are* according them profound spiritual significance.

They become a gift in the sense developed by Marcel Mauss (2000 [1954]), potentially creating links of obligation, expectation and the promise of future exchange between Christians and God (*cf.* Bourdieu 1997).¹²

At the same time, there is a redemption of their history. The past relationship of the people to the landscape is reclaimed as part of the gift of identity given by God. Drawing the idea of the mountains into their Christian worship, the people reconnect with the mountains in spiritual terms. Again in regard to the Sumbanese, Keane noted that Protestant (in his case, Calvinist) Christianity, and the possibility for conversion it promises, reorder the relationship of those in the present to their own history. 'For if conversion has historical implications, then history has moral implications' (Keane 2007, 115; see also Orta 2004, 269–272). Following Ingold (1993, 155), I suggest that these meanings of the mountains are not being 'attached to the world', but are being 'gathered from it'. Viewing themselves as fundamentally 'of' the mountains, and not simply 'in' the mountains as a reflection of God's will and action, these Christians are negotiating a new history for their identity in Christian (purified) terms. They are reordering the moral relationship they have with the landscape itself, from one associated with a non-Christian past to one indicative of their relationship with God and their calling to 'reach [their] own people' with the Gospel message. Though the pre-Christian religions of mountain peoples reflected a moral order of their own, the BIBAK Christians refashion this order around the Christian God and theologies of creation, sovereignty and universality reflected in their own cultural particularity.

This is, of course, a reordering of the 'culture' concept generally, from one of parochial particularity to something removed from the 'true' identity of the individual to become a tool in the service of their Christian lives. Unlike those Christians, particularly Pentecostals and some fundamentalist groups, who see the past as utterly incompatible with a Christian future, BIBAK Protestants are able to desacralise their past and render it acceptable in their current faith (*cf.* Meyer 1999; Austin-Broos 1997). Though the mountains themselves represent a less portable part of this cultural complex than a piece of fabric or a locally made drum, they become a kind of portable leitmotif of identity and power that can be re-inscribed with power from God rather than from ancestors or traditional spiritual forces.

This is a familiar strategy for Christians in many places. Christianity, as a religion, is often simultaneously placeless and locally inscribed, drawing on the universal notions of history and time as a singular stream (see Sanneh 1993; also Walls 1996). For BIBAK Christians, this is not the same as the kind of adoption described by Robbins (2004) or the duality of Jebens (2005) in which two distinct and paradoxical cultural logics exist in a side-by-side relationship, each vying for dominance as people negotiate their competing demands. Though the cultural logic of Christianity has been substantially adopted by the BIBAK congregations, this adoption has not impaired their ability to re-imagine locality or incorporate that locality into their Christian identity. Rather, it has provided the means for a re-inculturation of identity around the motif of land and landscape.

Conclusion: The Christian Landscape

Anthropologists of Christianity have noted that, even as Christians have joined in larger narratives of global religion, they have emphasised and even valorised locality and cultural particularity as compatible with or beneficial to their Christianity (Austin-Broos 2001; Orta 2004; see also Alvarsson 2003, 47). However, unlike examples where this kind of assertion of ethnic particularity seems to be a political strategy or motivated by another proximate cause (Alvarsson 2003; Lorentzen 2001, 95–97), the BIBAK Christians argue that their connection to ethnic and geographic particularity is mandated by their faith itself: ‘He is the one who made us, made us the way we are.’ They have found in their theological commitments a renewed commitment to the identity of the past, reconfigured as part of the universal stream of history encompassed by the Christian narrative. They are bound to God through the gift of the mountains alongside the gift of grace and life transmuted upon conversion.

This is not a syncretic or revitalisation movement in which past religious ideas are brought into the Christian milieu. Rather, it is a particularly Christian effort to reclaim and refigure the past. Working against the common anthropological assumption that Christians concerned with orthodoxy, as BIBAK Christians are, necessarily embrace an ascetic religion of modernity, this case suggests that concerns of ‘culture’ or place need not be marginalised or excised from religious life. It is, perhaps, a way for BIBAK Christians to overcome the radical discontinuity of their faith that would cut them off from a localised identity. Whereas Max Weber and scholars after him saw in Christianity an intractable movement towards modernisation and disenchantment classically construed, the BIBAK case echoes Cannell’s (2006, 22) assertion that ethnographic examples of Christianity often suggest ‘a more complex and active role for Christian thought and Christian institutions’.

This is not to valorise the change explored here. As numerous scholars of conversion and Christian development have noted, even as local people re-imagine their Christianity and locality as mutually constitutive, modernity and capitalistic logic often (and certainly in this case) come along for the ride (Aragon 2000; Robbins 2004; Keane 2007). The logic of market capitalism is deeply embedded in the narrative of self and the work of purification that draws distinctions between the concepts of ‘religion’ and ‘culture’, ‘self’ and ‘identity’ (Keane 2007, 84–91). The example of the BIBAK church suggests, however, that the modernist conceptual framework is neither immutable nor irresistible. Innovation and re-inscription of the material world and Christian relations remain possible as local categories are re-imagined in Christian terms.

The mountains of northern Luzon may not have regained their past power as the homes of gods and the sources of life, but they have found new significance in the discursive cosmos of BIBAK Christians. They once again point the way to an identity and source of significance, often still derided in the modern Philippine state. Reaffirming the agency of humans and the Divine, stripping the material world of

power and spiritual effect, has not left that material world bereft of significance. Purification may continue and the logic of the market may remain central to the religious lives of BIBAK Christians, but they can re-enchant the geography of their lives as the mountains rise up in their spiritual imagination.

Notes

- [1] *Acknowledgments*: A version of this paper was first presented at the Association of Asian Studies meeting in Atlanta, GA, in April 2008, as part of a panel organised by Catherine Allerton. I am grateful to Catherine for the opportunity to think through some material that had not yet found a home. I am also indebted to Matthew Amster and Kari Telle, who were also on the panel, as well as our discussant, Mary Steedly, for their interaction with the paper. Funding for this research was provided by the Pew Foundation through its Research Enablement Program and the National Science Foundation (grant # 581-6518), with support for its preparation from the Aldeen Fund of Wheaton College. I thank these groups for their support.
- [2] SEND International (formerly the Far Eastern Gospel Crusade) was founded in 1947 from a merger of the Far Eastern Bible Institute with the G. I. Gospel Hour in the Philippines and Japan, and established as an interdenominational, Evangelical mission to develop indigenous churches. Its missionaries served primarily in Japan and the Philippines.
- [3] When outside their traditional regions, mountain people may refer to themselves as 'Igorots'. Although this term is controversial among intellectuals and some indigenous activists, it is often interchanged with the term 'Cordillerian' to refer to the upland people of the Northern Philippines (*cf.* Finin 2005).
- [4] BIBAK was also the name of a student movement founded in Baguio City in the 1950s. No members of the BIBAK congregation or of other Protestant churches with whom I worked noted this connection, however.
- [5] The classification of Christians is complex. For this paper, I use 'conservative Protestants' to denote Christians who do not identify as Pentecostal, Anglican or Catholic. The BIBAK churches hold to doctrinal positions identified as 'evangelical' by historians of Christianity (see Balmer and Winner 2002, 22–24, 71–72).
- [6] Following many recent works in the anthropology of Christianity, this is a study of a discursive construction in which the practices of the community are rooted in the linguistic practices of narrative, testimony and public speech central to Christian life generally (*e.g.*, see Engelke 2007; Cannell 2005, 174).
- [7] Keane is building on the idea advanced by Bruno Latour (1993) in his critique of science in Western society. Keane notes that he is not adopting the concept wholesale, but applying it to the work of Christians in the Reformed tradition to make a case for the modernist semiotic shift he believes such Christians undertook and embraced through their Christian commitments.
- [8] Such purification was explicit in the US colonial era, as administrators in charge of education attacked the idolatry of lowland Filipinos (see Cannell 2005).
- [9] Given that the vast majority of my work was among Baptists, there is no doubt that the narratives I collected were reflective of that conversionist tradition. I would suggest, however, that among non-liturgical (that is, not Anglican or Lutheran) Protestants in the Philippines, the conversion narrative incorporating elements of transformation and decision-making is a widespread and commonly understood form.
- [10] In speaking of the 'moral order' here and below, I am not referring to morality as opposed to immorality, but to the ordering of the moral universe as described by Austin-Broos (1997)

and Joel Robbins (2004), among others. Furthermore, I do not mean to imply that mountain communities *lacked* a moral order prior to Christianity, but, rather, to point to the *reordering* of these moral systems. Regarding the moral orders of traditional/non-Christian communities in contexts of change, see M. Rosaldo (1980), R. Rosaldo (1980), Russell and Cunningham (1989) and Wiber (1993).

- [11] This was also true of many of the younger leaders in the Chinese-Filipino Baptist church that was a part of my research (see Howell 2008, 110–11), who felt that the use of Chinese language and culture was an affront to the ‘real’ concerns of the Church, which were evangelism and spiritual growth. Engelke (2007), Keane (2007) and Cannell (2006, 14–22), among others (*cf.* Englund and Leach 2000), have likewise pointed out the frequently paradoxical nature of Christianity in its local specificity and transcendent concerns.
- [12] As an anonymous reviewer for this article pointed out, this point warrants elaboration. The BIBAK discursive construction of the mountains and their connection to the mountain people as a ‘gift’ suggested this link. There is not space here to elaborate fully the idea of exchange and gift in this formulation of BIBAK understandings of landscape and identity. However, Simon Coleman’s (2004, 422) description of the gift among Charismatic Swedish Christians has an analogous relationship, breaking down distinctions between selves and objects (in this case, the mountains) and emphasising how, even in the desacralised landscape, ‘people create and maintain spiritual ideals through the exchange of goods and the construction of spaces’.

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